

Drug Intelligence Brief



DRUG ENFORCEMENT ADMINISTRATION
INTELLIGENCE DIVISION

September 2002

INCREASES IN SOUTHWEST ASIAN HEROIN IN THE DOMESTIC MONITOR AND HEROIN SIGNATURE PROGRAMS

Overview

Heroin obtained through two Intelligence Division programs undergoes in-depth chemical analysis to determine geographic source area origin and purity. Heroin samples from the Domestic Monitor Program (DMP) come from retail/street level purchases, while samples tested for the Heroin Signature Program (HSP) are primarily taken from seizures made at ports of entry. Samples tested under both of these programs show an apparent increase in the availability of Southwest Asian (SWA) heroin, which is primarily produced in Afghanistan.



DMP

In 2001, the DMP recorded 30 purchases of SWA heroin nationwide; in the previous year, 25 purchases tested as SWA heroin. However, this is a considerable increase over the eight SWA heroin purchases in 1999.

The Washington, DC, area shows the strongest increase in SWA purchases, accounting for 13 of the 30 SWA purchases made in 2001. In 2001, according to the Washington Field Division, 42 percent of the DMP heroin purchases made in its area of responsibility, for which a source area could be determined, originated in Southwest Asia. This includes one purchase with a purity level of 91.6 percent. Since the late 1990s, most of the heroin available at the street level in the District of Columbia has been from South America. However, since 1998, the DMP has indicated that SWA heroin has accounted for an increasing portion of the heroin at the street level.

Heroin availability in the Washington, DC, area usually mirrors availability in the New York City area, because that area is the primary source of supply for the Washington market. However, no SWA heroin samples were purchased in New York City in 2001, and only three were purchased in 2000. This may indicate that a Washington area-based organization supplies the SWA heroin.

Although there are apparently limited quantities of SWA heroin available on the streets of New York City, on September 10, 2001, the Queens Narcotics Bureau of the New York Police Department seized approximately 50 kilograms of SWA heroin with a purity of 53 percent. The heroin was seized from Colombian traffickers who had received it as a payment for a drug debt owed them by Afghan traffickers. Delivery of the heroin, from Europe to the United States, was arranged through a German broker.

HSP

In 2000, SWA heroin was 16 percent of the total weight analyzed under HSP. The previous year, it accounted for only 6 percent of the total.

HEROIN SIGNATURE PROGRAM DATA: 2000

Heroin Source Area	Annual Percentage	Weight kilograms	Purity percent
South America	59	346.4	79
Mexico	17	99.9	36
Southwest Asia	16	98.1	77
Southeast Asia	8	45.6	72

SWA Smuggling Patterns

Most of the SWA heroin analyzed in 2000 was brought into the country by West African nationals. Their travel often originated in Africa and frequently ended at JFK International Airport in New York. Although the swallowing of heroin pellets was a common smuggling method, one shipment, concealed in luggage, totaled 23 kilograms. However, a small portion of this shipment was Southeast Asian (SEA) heroin. Another courier, flying from Nigeria, was arrested at JFK with 17 kilograms of SEA heroin that had been concealed in foodstuffs. For a number of years, West Africans have trafficked in both SWA and SEA heroin. A preliminary review of data collected under the HSP for 2001 shows similar patterns.

This report was prepared by the DEA Intelligence Division, Domestic Intelligence Section, Domestic Strategic Unit. This report reflects information received prior to April 2002. Comments and requests for copies are welcome and may be faxed to the Intelligence Production Unit, Intelligence Division, DEA Headquarters, at (202) 307-8726.